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ABSTRACT

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 53 university students with visual, hearing, and motor impairments to determine their use and perception of campus library services. Ss, who majored in a wide range of disciplines, rated their use of library services. Most frequent use was reported by students with motor impairments, while 21% of visually impaired Ss indicated no use. Accessibility problems were noted, including parking, limited wheelchair room, and inadequacy of signs. Ss expressed some dissatisfaction with staff attitudes and assistance. The need for library use instruction that would include special orientation and teaching was cited. Difficulties reported with materials and equipment were associated primarily with visual impairment. Seven recommendations were formulated including special photocopy services for visually and motor impaired students and increased inservice training for staff. (CL)

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LIBRARY NEEDS AND USES BY DISABLED STUDENTS AT THE FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY: A SURVEY

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Conference on Academic Library Services
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LIBRARY NEEDS AND USES BY DISABLED STUDENTS AT THE FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY: A SURVEY

Introduction

This user needs survey was prepared as a background paper for this conference by The Florida State University School of Library and Information Studies graduate students in the Spring 1983 class on library and information service to disabled persons. We are presenting the results of fifty three interviews of disabled university students about their use and perceptions of campus libraries at The Florida State University. While we cannot generalize the findings, we hope that the description of the methodology, the problems that we encountered, and suggested modifications of the methodology might be of some use to others who plan to conduct a similar study at their academic institution.

Relatively few studies of academic library use by disabled students are reported in the literature. Parkin (6) interviewed eleven visually impaired students at Brigham Young University in 1974. He reported their most important needs to be a file of catalogs of special format reading materials, a current list of services available to the blind from federal, regional, or state agencies, more private listening rooms, and a special librarian to serve as the contact person for visually impaired students in the library. In 1975 Major (4) utilized telephone interviews to query twenty-six visually impaired students regarding their use and perceptions of Ohio State University's library for the blind. She reported findings similar to those of Parkin, but

also noted that the needs of the blind and the partially sighted differ and that special equipment is not heavily utilized. G oss (2) employed an interpreter to interview thirty nine deaf students about their library needs at St. Petersburg Junior College. She utilized the resulting data to develop specialized library instruction for deaf students.

Several studies have surveyed academic library directors to determine what services were available for disabled students in their libraries. The State Library of Ohio (3) produced a state directory of academic library resources and services for handicapped students in 1976. Thomas (7) produced a similar directory for Texas in 1978. Deveaux (1) surveyed a random sample of eighty four academic library directors to determine library services provided for disabled persons.

Needham (5) developed a management checklist for academic library services to disabled students. In the development process he conducted interviews with disabled students at The Florida State University. He described The Florida State University as having one of the larger populations of disabled students in the nation (p. 273).

Methodology

A list of potential students was obtained from the Office of Disabled Students. Visual, hearing and motor impaired students were identified from the list. Motor impaired students had orthopedic and neurologic disabilities; conditions such as spina bifida, post-polio, and scoliosis were included. Students with conditions such as diabetes, cancer, respiratory disorders, substance abuse, blood serum disorder, and cardiovascular disorders were omitted as non-applicable to this

study.

A stratified random sample was drawn from the resulting list of visual, hearing and motor impaired students.

Instrument

A semi-structured interview questionnaire was designed to elicit information from disabled students concerning library use, problems encountered, and suggestions for improvement. The instrument was pretested on three members of the population and reviewed by the head reference librarian of Strozier Library. As a result of the pretest and review, slight modification in the interview questionnaire was made.

Data Gathering Techniques

The five interviewers attempted to conduct all interviews in person. However, when this approach was inconvenient for the interviewee, telephone interviews were substituted. Interviews were conducted between February 8 and March 29, 1983.

Problems in Data Collection

The list obtained from the Office of Disabled Students was not completely current or correct, and the interviewers experienced difficulties in contacting the randomly selected students. Two weeks after beginning interviews, the random sample approach was abandoned and interviewers used any name from the population. Additional names of disabled students were obtained from the University's Division of Blind Services, Advocates for Disabled Students, and Disabled Student Services.

Interviews were conducted both on and off campus. Interviewees occasionally failed to keep appointments, and many call-backs were necessary to arrange appointments. Data collection was very time-consuming. Approximately 115 hours were spent in making appointments and conducting the 53 interviews.

The majority of the students who were contacted did participate in the interview process. Most interviewees were cooperative and thoughtful in verbalizing their needs.

Analysis of Data

Description of Participants

The sample consisted of 8 hearing impaired, 14 visually impaired, and 31 motor impaired students for a total of 53 participants. Twenty-two participants had been disabled for less than half of their lives. The remaining participants had been disabled either all or most of their lives. Forty participants were undergraduates, 11 were graduates, and 2 were special students. The 53 participants had majors in 33 different disciplines. The three most frequently cited disciplines were computer science, with seven majors, and political science and vocational rehabilitation, with four majors each. The range of majors included such disciplines as theater, meteorology, bilingual education, and accounting.

Library Use

Library use varied according to disability. On a daily to weekly basis, a campus library was used by 68 percent of the motor impaired, 37.5 percent of the hearing impaired, and 14 percent of the

visually impaired students. Either monthly or infrequently, a campus library was used by 32 percent of the motor impaired, 62.5 percent of the hearing impaired, and 64 percent of the visually impaired. Twenty-one percent of the visually impaired reported that they never use a campus library. Library use by disabled students is graphically illustrated in Table 1. Seventy-three percent of the 11 graduate students used a campus library on a daily to weekly basis. Only 40 percent of the 40 disabled undergraduate students used a campus library on a daily to weekly basis. For all groups, use of a campus library was primarily for education related activities. Research was the most frequently given reason for using a campus library.

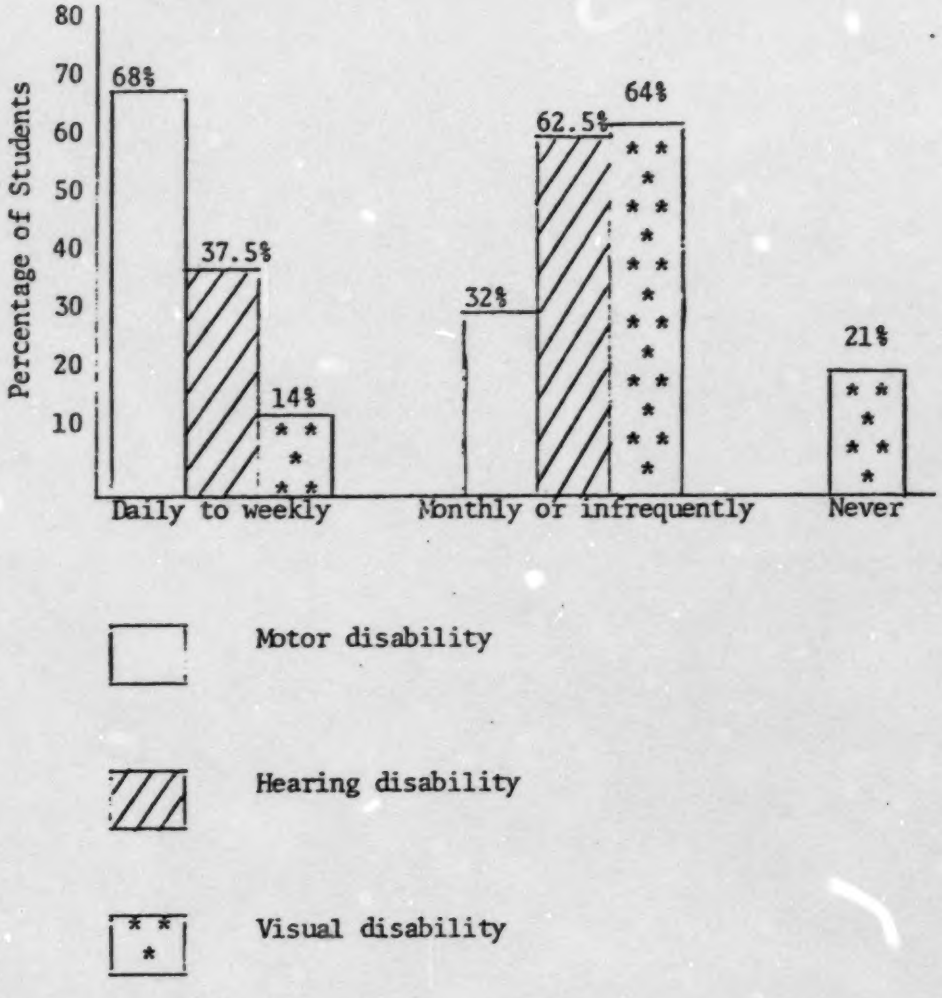
Physical Accessibility

The only group to express problems in parking facilities was the motor impaired. Three students, or 10 percent of this group, mentioned difficulty with parking.

Students entering Strozier Library must go through three sets of doors, two of which must be pulled open for entrance and pushed for exit. The third set is counterbalanced. Twenty percent of all respondents complained of difficulties in maneuvering through library doors. Twenty-five percent of the motor impaired and 14 percent of the visually impaired were concerned about doors. Wheelchair patrons suggested that doors be either double swinging or automatic. One student, who has no sensation in the feet, expressed a fear of undetected injury as a result of pushing the door to exit the library. One visually impaired student noted that the doors were "tricky."

Table 1

Library Use by Disability



One wheelchair patron reported difficulty maneuvering the wheelchair to access the elevator control panel and found the buttons to be too high. A partially sighted student needed more light in the elevator. Another partially sighted patron suggested that stairs be marked with contrasting colors to enhance visibility. The restrooms were identified as dimly-lighted areas. A motor impaired patron reported the need for improved outside lighting. The student was almost struck by a car while crossing the street adjacent to the library.

One wheelchair patron was unaware that there were emergency exits from the building. Strozier Library does have side and rear emergency exits. The same patron recommended developing a plan for evacuating wheelchair patrons in case of elevator failure.

The motor impaired students identified a set of problems particular to their disabilities. Six, or 50 percent of the wheelchair patrons, reported tables being too low to accommodate a wheelchair. This complaint also applied to tables in AV booths and with computer terminals. Maneuvering around kickstools placed between the stacks was cited as a problem by five, or 42 percent, of the wheelchair respondents. Wheelchair widths differ, and some patrons reported stack aisles too narrow while others found them adequate. One wheelchair patron noted difficulty in turning the wheelchair in the limited space at the end of stack aisles. Fifteen, or approximately 50 percent, of the motor impaired, reported difficulty in retrieving items from high and low shelving. One student suggested that the library provide reaching devices to aid in retrieving materials.

Inadequacy of signs was reported by both motor and visually disabled students. One visually impaired student recommended large print signs in contrasting colors be placed at eye level. Three nonsighted respondents suggested the use of tactile maps.

Three of the respondents noted the need for more seating. One patron found getting to a table difficult due to lack of space for his wheelchair.

Staff and Services

Twenty-five, or half of the respondents who use a campus library, rated the staff favorably. Four respondents found the staff unhelpful or insensitive. One motor impaired student commented that "sometimes [staff is] not in the mood to help you and sometimes [they] make you feel stupid." Two students found inconsistency in staff helpfulness. One patron suggested that nonreference staff should be more friendly. Six respondents -- one motor, one hearing, and four visually impaired -- noted insensitivity of reference staff to students with invisible disabilities. Comments from the partially sighted respondents included: Librarians should be aware that there is more than one classification of blind. "If you can't see, you're not freeloading, but can't read the print in indexes." A hearing impaired student said, "Reference staff makes me feel conspicuous by talking loud and in elementary words. [It is] difficult to talk over the desk." One motor impaired patron suggested the need for a staff person "to be on the look out for disabled students in need -- not to wait to be asked for assistance."

Four motor impaired and two visually impaired respondents noted

the need for retrieval service and card catalog assistance. Three visually impaired respondents said that using the library required that they bring a reader. A blind nonuser complained that there was nothing to use in the library without a reader. One motor impaired student brought another person to the library to be his "hands." Three, or 21 percent, of the visually impaired students requested longer circulation periods.

Three respondents recommended that one librarian be designated as a resource librarian serving disabled students.

Bibliographic Instruction

When queried concerning library use instruction, respondents suggested both teaching methods and instruction needs. Among the motor impaired students, nine, or 29 percent, commented that the regular orientation tour offered by the library was appropriate for their needs. None of the motor impaired students requested a special tour. However, three, or 21 percent, of the visually impaired students, and two, or 25 percent, of the hearing impaired students, preferred a special tour. Two visually impaired students suggested that the tour be supplemented with a braille pamphlet. One sight impaired and one hearing impaired student commented that no special tour was needed. Four, or 29 percent, of the visually impaired students would like taped library use instruction. Two, or 25 percent, of the hearing impaired students recommended taped instruction and three, or 10 percent, of the motor impaired students indicated that taped instruction would be useful. Ten respondents recommended group instruction with two visually impaired persons wanting

small group instruction. Individual instruction was the preferred mode for five, or 36 percent, of the visually impaired respondents and four, or 50 percent, of the hearing impaired respondents. However, six, or 20 percent, of the motor impaired students requested individual instruction. One visually impaired student recommended large print computer-assisted instruction. One visually, two hearing and four motor impaired students requested pamphlets on various aspects of library use. Bibliographic instructional preferences by disability are summarized in Table 2.

The need for specific library skills was identified by 17 respondents. Four visually impaired students needed instruction in using the card catalog and indexes. Two visually impaired students wanted library use instruction in order to teach their readers to assist them. Four motor impaired respondents wanted instruction in using indexes and four others requested subject-related bibliographic instruction.

Materials and Equipment

The difficulties related to materials and equipment were associated primarily with visual impairment. Four respondents suggested that more space be made available for braillers, closed circuit television, and tape recorders. Two requested better Braille dictionaries. One asked that a large print dictionary be added to the reference collection. Two requested that recent periodicals be available on tape. One reported that the magnification of the microform readers was not adequate for the partially sighted.

A problem common to both visually and motor impaired respondents was photocopying service. Four motor impaired and three visually impaired

Table 2

Student Preferences in Bibliographic Instruction by Disability

Type of Instruction	Motor Disability	Hearing Disability	Visual Disability
Regular tour	29%	12%	7%
Special tour	--	25%	21%
Taped instruction	10%	25%	29%
Group instruction	13%	23%	29%
Individual instruction	20%	50%	36%
Large print CAI	--	--	7%
Pamphlets	13%	25%	7%

Students suggested multiple preferences for bibliographic instruction; therefore, total percentages vary

students encountered problems in photocopying without assistance.

Generic Problems

Common library problems which were noted by respondents included misshelved or missing books and periodicals. Eleven, or 35 percent, of the motor impaired, and four, or 50 percent, of the hearing impaired students, noted this problem. The bypass security system was inconvenient for one motor impaired and one visually impaired student.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

Based upon interview responses, certain trends were identified in library use by disabled students at The Florida State University.

1. The visually impaired users require special equipment and materials and need more direct information delivery than the typical academic reference service provides.

2. The motor impaired users need assistance in using the card catalog and retrieving materials from stacks.

3. The visually and hearing impaired students prefer individual library use instruction.

4. The motor impaired students prefer "mainstreamed" library use instruction.

Recommendations

To improve library service to the disabled students at The Florida State University, the following recommendations are offered:

1. Doors should be modified for easier entrance and exit.

2. Disabled students should be informed of the location of

emergency exits.

3. A limited number of tables and carrels on each floor should be modified for use by wheelchair patrons.

4. A special photocopy service should be provided for visually and motor impaired students.

5. More library use instruction should be provided for the use of indexes. The instruction should be both in print and on tape.

6. Inservice training should be utilized to sensitize staff to types and levels of disabilities and to teach staff appropriate techniques for assisting the disabled patron.

7. The number of problems encountered by disabled students in library use justifies the designation of a resource librarian to coordinate service to these students.

Replication of Study

For those wishing to attempt a similar study for an academic library, the following advice is offered:

1. Distinguish between wheelchair and nonwheelchair motor impaired students and between totally blind and partially sighted students.

2. Identification of disabled students is difficult. Contact all appropriate campus offices and personnel in an effort to obtain comprehensive and current lists of such students.

3. College students are highly mobile and their addresses frequently change; therefore, a perfect list will not be found. At The Florida State University, a helpful resource in obtaining current

telephone numbers was the campus information operator.

4. Students are difficult to contact and appointments are not always kept; therefore, allow ample time for data collection.

5. More disabled students might have contributed to this survey had it been publicized in the campus newspaper. A news release with a telephone number could have solicited information from volunteer respondents.

6. Contacting the hearing impaired students by telephone did not prove to be satisfactory. A late mailing of questionnaires did not elicit a response. This mailing might have been productive had it occurred earlier in the data collection process.

7. The open ended questions of the survey were productive; however, certain responses needed uniformity for data comparison. Should this or a similar questionnaire be used again, a checklist should be provided for reasons for library use (e.g., research, study, and recreational reading); types of bibliographic instruction (e.g., individual instruction, taped instruction, computer assisted instruction, group instruction, course related instructed); problems encountered in library use (e.g., lighting, doors, aisle width, signs, seating). Space for comments should be included following checklists.

8. Demographics placed at the end of the interview proved helpful for two reasons: a) personal information is more easily requested after rapport is established with the interviewee; b) demographics successfully ends an interview with a talkative respondent.

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QUESTIONNAIRE ON LIBRARY SERVICES FOR DISABLED STUDENTS

Disability

☐ Hearing

☐ Sight

☐ Motor

☐ Other _____

You can help the library to better serve disabled students by identifying the strengths and/or weaknesses you have encountered. Your help will be a real service.

A. Library Use

1. How often do you use the library? ☐ every day; ☐ every week; ☐ every month; ☐ seldom; ☐ never*
*If never, go to section E.

2. How has the library been of help to you in your studies or in other activities?

_____

_____

_____

3. What problem(s) (if any) do you encounter when you use the library? (For example, reference; reserve; periodicals; photocopy facilities; card catalog; circulation desk; microforms)

_____

_____

_____

B. Services

4. How could the physical arrangement of the library be improved to be of more help to you?

_____

_____

_____

5. How could the library staff be of more help to you?

_____

_____

_____

6. What kind of library instruction would be most helpful to you? (special tour; taped instruction; group instruction; individual instruction, etc.)

_____

_____

_____

7. Is there any particular format of material or equipment that you find lacking? ☐yes ☐no

_____

_____

C. Suggestions

8. In what other ways would you like to see the library improved?

_____

_____

_____

_____

D. Demographics

9. About how many years have you had your disability? _____
(☐close to birth; ☐very recent)

10. Most frequently used library _____

11. Classification ☐Freshman/Sophomore; ☐Junior/Senior; ☐Grad.; ☐Special.

12. Major _____

E. Non-Users

13. For what reasons don't you use the library?

_____

_____

_____

_____

14. What changes would encourage you to use the library?

_____

_____

_____

15. About how many years have you had your disability?_____
(☐close to birth; ☐very recent)

16. Classification ☐Freshman/Sophomore; ☐Junior/Senior; ☐Grad.; ☐Special.

17. Major_____